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SUBJECT: PAKISTAN MEDIA REACTION: APRIL 01, 2009

Summary: Reports on the Supreme Court ruling "restoring the government of the Punjab Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif" dominated front pages in all newspapers on Wednesday. Some major newspapers highlighted the statement from the State Department terming the verdict as the "country's internal matter." U.S. CENTCOM General Petraeus remarks emphasizing that the "U.S. military is putting 'additional focus' on rooting out ties between Pakistan's intelligence service and the Taliban" received extensive coverage in all major dailies. Newspapers also underlined Prime Minister Gilani's statement repudiating the U.S. officials' allegations of ISI's connections with Taliban. All dailies reported that the "TTP (Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan) chief Baitullah Mahsud claimed responsibility" of terrorist attack on a police training center in Lahore and warned of "attacks on the U.S. soil." Several major dailies quoted Secretary Clinton as saying that "we must give Pakistan the tools it needs to fight the extremists."

Most major dailies ran editorials on the restoration of the PML-N government in Punjab as a result of the Supreme Court's interim decree. However newspapers also continued to editorialize the aftermath of terrorist attack in Lahore. The Lahore-based liberal daily, "Daily Times," noted that "Pakistan's enemy number one is the TTP, which commands the chaos-making activities of the Taliban in the tribal areas and Swat and is now expanding its activity to Punjab and the southern region, including Karachi." The center-right national daily, "The Nation," advised that "we must continue the effort to bring home to the Americans that the drone strikes are not only hurting the sensitivities of the proud people of this country, but also damaging the very cause for which they were being made." A prominent op-ed writer noted in the centrist national daily, "The News," that "our rulers take U.S. largesse and allow the Pakistan army to go in and kill Pakistani citizens, more space is created for violent extremists using terror as a strategy." End Summary.

News Stories

"SC Hands Punjab Back To Shahbaz" "Dawn" (04/01)

"The Supreme Court restored Shahbaz Sharif as Chief Minister of Punjab on Tuesday, a day before the Provincial Assembly was called to choose his successor to the office which he had lost in consequence of a ruling by the apex court on February 25, 2009."

"Shahbaz Bounces Back, Thanks to SC" "The News" (04/01)

"The Supreme Court on Tuesday suspended operation of its earlier judgment of February 25, disqualifying PML-N President Mian Muhammad Shahbaz Sharif from contesting elections and restored him as the Punjab Chief Minister."

"Shahbaz's Restoration Pak Internal Matter: U.S." "The Nation" (04/01)

"The United States on Tuesday offered no comments on Pakistan Supreme Court's decision to restore PML-N leader Shahbaz Sharif as Chief Minister of Punjab, saying it was the country's internal matter, State Department Deputy spokesman Gordon Duguid said in response to a question at the regular news briefing."

"U.S. Needs To Build Trust With Pakistan: Patraeus" "The Nation" (04/01)

"The United States military will reserve the 'right of last resort' to deal with the threats inside Pakistan, but it would prefer to enable Pakistani military to do the job itself, Gen. David Patraeus said in an interview with 'Fox News.' He said that U.S. military is putting 'additional focus' on rooting out ties between Pakistan's intelligence service and the Taliban...."

"PM Rejects Allegations Against Army, ISI" "Dawn" (04/01)

"Rejecting allegations leveled by U.S. general about ISI's relations with Taliban militants, Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani said on Tuesday that the Pakistan army and Inter-Services Intelligence were professional institutions which supported democracy and were answerable to the Prime Minister."

"Baitullah Claims Responsibility For Terror Attacks" "Dawn" (04/01)

"Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan has claimed responsibility for Monday's terrorist attack on a police training school in Lahore and said such attacks might be stepped up. He also warned of attacks on the U.S. soil. He said that President Asif Zardari had permitted the U.S. to carry out drone attacks and, therefore, Taliban would step up their activities unless drone attacks in tribal areas are stooped."

"Baitullah Threatens Swoop On White House" "The News" (04/01)

"... Also, the top militant commander and leader of the banned Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), threatened to show his power to the world when his people would attack the U.S. capital as a reaction to frequent drone attacks in the tribal areas and the reward on his head."

"Three Top Al Qaeda Men Nabbed In Lahore" "The News" (04/01)

"In a major breakthrough secret agencies are understood to have captured three high profile Al Qaeda members in Lahore on Tuesday in the light of fresh information obtained from the captured Afghan national during the Manawan attack. Officials were highly optimistic that after the arrest of these Al Qaeda figures, whose identities were being kept secret, the network of these terrorists based in Lahore might be broken."

"Hillary's Overture To Taliban" "The News" (04/01)

"The International conference on Afghanistan in The Hague got off to an auspicious start with U.S. Secretary of state Hillary Clinton echoing Pakistan's long standing strategy that 'peace talks' are the one of the several ways out to bring sustainable peace in the region, as military means along had not delivered. The United States offered Taliban fighters, who renounce violence in Afghanistan, an 'honorable form of reconciliation' at a time when more Pakistani soldiers have been killed than the combined casualties of foreign troops in Afghanistan."

"Proposal For \$2.8 Billion Military Aid" "Dawn" (04/01)

"The Obama administration plans to propose roughly \$2.8 billion in aid for the Pakistani military as a U.S. senate panel holds a full committee hearing on a bill which seeks to triple U.S. economic assistance to Pakistan. The military aid would be in addition to a \$7.5 billion aid package which will be reintroduced in the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations on Wednesday."

"Senator Says No U.S. Aid Until Pakistan Hits Militants" "Dawn"
(04/01)

"Pakistan must prove it is willing to take on extremists within its own borders before the U.S. delivers financial aid or weapons to the government there, a key senator said on Tuesday. Senator Carl Levin, chairman of the Armed Services Committee, said he did not believe the United States could buy stability in Pakistan."

"Pak-Afghan Issue Needs Balanced Approach: FM" "The Nation" (04/01)

"Pakistan on Tuesday urged the international community to adopt a balanced approach towards Islamabad and Kabul based on the principles of respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-interference. Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi said this while addressing the 'International Conference on Afghanistan' held at The Hague."

"Zardari In Turkey For Talks With Karzai" "Dawn" (04/01)

"President Asif Ali Zardari arrived in Ankara on Tuesday for Turkish-sponsored talks with Afghan counterpart Hamid Karzai on boosting cooperation against extremists, a Pakistani diplomat said."

"Pakistan Eager To Resume Talks With India" "Dawn" (04/01)

"Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi said on Tuesday that Pakistan was eager to resume 'as soon as possible' peace talks with India that were stalled by the Mumbai terror attacks. Speaking on the sidelines of a conference on Afghanistan in The Hague, he said his government believed repairing relations between the nuclear-armed neighbors was 'in Pakistan's interests.'"

"Singh Stalls Zardari's Bid to Revive Talks" "Dawn" (04/01)

"Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has all but rejected President Asif Ali Zardari's suggestion to revive the composite dialogue between their countries, saying Islamabad first needs to show results in pursuit of the Mumbai attack plotters."

"UN Worried About Health Of Solecki" "Dawn" (04/01)

"The UNHCR has expressed serious concern about the health of kidnapped UNHCR official John Solecki and appealed to his kidnappers to release him immediately, a statement issued by UN Quetta office on Tuesday."

"No Bar On Militants In Swat - Destruction Continues Even After Peace Accord" "The News" (04/01)

"Some people from the troubled Swat valley have alleged that the militants had not put an end to their activities in Matta and Kabal areas even after the peace deal as they were still dismantling the half-destroyed houses to sell the material. They have also complained that the militants were cutting and selling orchards in the area."

Editorials/Op-eds

"At Last, Pakistan Zeroes In On Baitullah Mehsud," an editorial in the Lahore-based liberal English language daily "Daily Times" (cir. 10,000) (04/01)

"Mehsud has claimed responsibility for the Manawan attack, and threatened to carry out similar operations in the future. The fact is that Pakistan's enemy number one is the TTP, which commands the chaos-making activities of the Taliban in the tribal areas and Swat and is now expanding its activity to Punjab and the southern region, including Karachi.... The foremost threat is internal and it comes directly from the Taliban-Al Qaeda combine, as proved by the incident at Manawan. The Pakistani mind should now be concentrated on the removal of this internal threat."

"Underlining Home Truths," an editorial in the center-right national

English daily "The Nation" (cir. 20,000) (04/01)

"We must continue the effort to bring home to the Americans that the drone strikes are not only hurting the sensitivities of the proud people of this country, but also damaging the very cause for which they were being made. There are almost daily reminders of the death of innocent civilians by pilotless planes, with vengeful terrorist attacks taking place across Pakistan. The reconstruction opportunity zones promised by President Bush three years ago would not serve the purpose, if drones were allowed to play havoc at the same time."

"The Aftermath," an editorial in the centrist national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (04/01)

"Yet we seem to be no closer than before to nailing the TTP leaders who apparently plan such missions or those who help execute them. There are still many questions that need answers. From where did the terrorists acquire the armored personnel carrier they used to enter the police school? Such vehicles can, after all, not be

easily bought in car showrooms. Why was the detailed intelligence apparently provided to authorities about just such an attack ignored.... And, perhaps most crucially of all, what are we doing to protect ourselves against more such attacks?"

"A Pakistani-Centric Understanding Of Militancy," an op-ed by Shireen M. Mazari in the centrist national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (04/01)

"After all, when our rulers take U.S. largesse and allow the Pakistan army to go in and kill Pakistani citizens, more space is created for violent extremists using terror as a strategy. When the Pakistani state allows its territory to be used for drones that kill Pakistanis - and it is irrelevant whether they are killed deliberately or as 'collateral damage' - more space is created for future recruits who want to fight the U.S. and its collaborators."

"Manawan, Af-Pak And Our Deeper Problem," an op-ed by Nasim Zehra in the centrist national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (04/01)

"Perhaps the most problematic of all is Pakistan's unqualified welcome of the Obama policy on Afghanistan. The refrain of the Obama policy is that Al Qaeda is strong inside Pakistan, that Pakistan is now the main theatre for the war against terrorism, that terrorism is the cancer that Pakistan needs to fight for its own sake. This can be a recipe for greater destabilization of Pakistan. For all that the U.S. war on terror may have achieved specifically in weakening Al Qaeda it has generated much greater resentment than accolades for itself...."

"Obama's Af-Pak Strategy," an op-ed by Gen. (R) Mirza Aslam Beg in the center-right national English daily "The Nation" (cir. 20,000) (04/01)

"After the realization that the resistance in Afghanistan, cannot be defeated, the task is now being transferred to Pakistan, to accomplish the mission. It is a very naive thinking, because it is not in the competence of Pak Army to defeat Taliban. Despite the best efforts made by the army, it could not achieve success in its operations within the Pakistani territory, in Waziristan, Bajaur and Swat. They rightly felt that the best option was to engage into a dialogue and come to a truce. If Pakistan follows U.S. dictates, for the truce agreement to be quashed, then we would be repeating the mistakes, General (R) Pervez Musharraf made." Patterson